

# **Florida Association of District School Superintendents**

## ***Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten Constitutional Amendment Implementation White Paper***

**March 6, 2003**

In November 2002, through a constitutional amendment, Florida's citizens voted to provide free universal prekindergarten (UPK) to all four-year-old children. The amendment provides prekindergarten on a voluntary basis for families. Governor Bush, the Florida Board of Education, and Commissioner of Education Jim Horne supported the amendment.

Florida's school superintendents also support quality prekindergarten programs as a foundation for future school success, particularly for at-risk children. To that end, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents developed a White Paper (October 21, 2002) in support of the amendment. In the FADSS White Paper, several issues were identified that would have to be addressed for the successful implementation of the amendment. It should be emphasized that sufficient funding is critical to ensuring that four-year-old children receive quality prekindergarten services.

This White Paper has been updated to focus on the implementation issues of the UPK amendment. These recommendations for implementation of the UPK amendment are from the perspective of district school superintendents who recognize the importance of students having a sound educational foundation upon entering kindergarten and who must balance competing education demands and requirements.

### **PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT**

#### **Ballot Language**

Article IX, Section, Florida constitution, is amended to read:

Section 1. Public Education. -

(b) Every four-year-old child in Florida shall be provided by the State a high quality prekindergarten learning opportunity in the form of an early childhood development and education program which shall be voluntary, high quality, free, and delivered according

to professionally accepted standards. An early childhood development and education program means an organized program designed to address and enhance each child's ability to make age appropriate progress in an appropriate range of settings in the development of language and cognitive capabilities and emotional, social, regulatory and moral capacities through education in basic skills and such other skills as the Legislature may determine to be appropriate.

(c) The early childhood education and development programs provided by reason of subparagraph (b) shall be implemented no later than the beginning of the 2005 school year through funds generated in addition to those used for existing education, health, and development programs. Existing education, health, and development programs are those funded by the State as of January 1, 2002 that provided for child or adult education, health care, or development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Florida Association of District School Superintendents developed the following plan to provide recommendations to the Legislature as it considers the implementation of the UPK Constitutional Amendment. This plan suggests that to meet the quality requirement of the amendment, the Legislature should focus on implementing the amendment. The Legislature should not attempt to broaden the scope of the amendment to include children from birth to age three or school age child care. While the state has attempted to address the issue of school readiness by combining funding from subsidized child care, the former Prekindergarten Early Intervention Program, and other early education programs, the result has been disjointed and ineffective. The implementation of this amendment should not be the vehicle to fix the entire system of subsidized child care at the expense of the four-year-old children for whom the amendment was passed.

These recommendations are summarized below and detailed in the remainder of this paper:

- ◆ These recommendations could be phased in over the next two years.
- ◆ A four-year-old is defined as a child who has attained the age of 4 years on or before September 1 of the school year for which the child is enrolling.
- ◆ The Department of Education should be designated as the governance entity for UPK.
- ◆ The Department of Education should develop a plan for implementing UPK including the establishment of program standards.
- ◆ Local district school boards should be designated as the administering body on the local level for UPK.
- ◆ Once a child is determined eligible for UPK, a child should remain eligible for the program throughout the school year prior to kindergarten eligibility.

- ◆ Parents should select from among UPK programs that have met state-set quality standards.
- ◆ Longitudinal evaluations should be conducted for individual student outcomes and for program provider quality for overall effectiveness.
- ◆ Funding for all eligible providers should be based on a formula and not on daily attendance.
- ◆ Universal Prekindergarten should be funded by the state for a 6 hour day, 180 day school year.

## **IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Governance**

The amendment is silent on governance. However, the amendment is placed in Article IX, Section 1, of the Florida Constitution. Section 1 currently speaks to the provision of a high quality system of free public schools. Given the placement of the amendment, public schools must play a strong role in the provision of prekindergarten programs to four-year-old children. In addition, the Class Size amendment encompasses pre-kindergarten programs.

**Action** - Designate the Department of Education (DOE) as the governance entity for UPK by establishing an Office of Universal Prekindergarten with DOE.

**Rationale** - Establishes continuity with the K-20 public education system and recognizes inclusion in the Class Size Amendment. Existing DOE expertise in administering literacy and other educational programs should be utilized to ensure quality prekindergarten programs. The mechanisms to efficiently administer and report formula-based funding are already in place.

**Action** - Designate district school boards as the administering body at the local level for all functions of the UPK program for four-year-olds. District school boards may contract with local coalitions to monitor UPK contracts with private early education and care providers.

**Rationale** - The district school board, as an elected body, is the appropriate local entity and is accountable to the local community. The expertise of school districts in the areas of financial services, longitudinal data collection and transmission, staff development/training, on-site supervision of instructional personnel, and security screening of personnel is well established. Additional services in the areas of transportation, food services, guidance, exceptional student education, and school psychologists are available. Transition between UPK and elementary programs requires

knowledge in early literacy and its correlation to the Sunshine State Standards at a level of expertise available in public schools.

### **Quality/Curriculum/Personnel**

**Action** - DOE should develop a plan for implementing UPK to be administered through school districts. The plan must include the following elements:

- ◆ A simplified point of entry into UPK for four-year-olds.
- ◆ A developmentally appropriate curriculum or curricula implementing the Sunshine State Standards according to current nationally recognized recommendations for high quality prekindergarten programs.
- ◆ A curriculum or curricula that includes a research-based literacy model and mathematics program.
- ◆ A ratio of direct instructional staff to children of 1:18 (Class size amendment specifies a 1:18 teacher/pupil ratio for prekindergarten). When certified teachers staff a classroom, those teachers must be certified for the appropriate grade levels. Teachers who are not certified for the appropriate grade level must obtain proper certification within 3 years. In addition to the direct instructional staff, each classroom must be staffed by a paraprofessional who has a Child Development Associate credential, or its equivalency, or an Associate's Degree in early education for safety reasons.

When a classroom is staffed by non-certified teachers there must be a program director or lead teacher who is eligible for certification or certified for the appropriate grade level for every 6 non-certified teachers. Each classroom must be staffed by at least two people who have, at a minimum, a paraprofessional who has a Child Development Associate credential, or its equivalency, or an Associate's Degree in early childhood education.

- ◆ An outline of research-based methods that the school district will use in including children with disabilities in the UPK program.
- ◆ A parent involvement/education component.
- ◆ A provision for parents to choose regarding a child's participation at a school-based site or among contracted sites.

**Rationale** - A comprehensive, high-quality, research-based program includes all of the above elements. Communities need to plan effectively to best utilize the existing programs to maximize the services to the greatest extent possible.

**Action** - DOE should implement procedures for monitoring the implementation of program quality standards statewide to determine a program's eligibility to continue to provide UPK.

**Rationale** - The prekindergarten constitutional amendment requires a high quality program available for all four-year-old children. Equity for all children can best be ensured by the establishment of a single set of quality standards to be implemented statewide.

### **Eligibility/Access**

**Action** – As a phase-in measure, ensure that children who are four-years-old on or before September 1, 2003 and who are currently enrolled in School Readiness Programs pursuant to s. 411.01, F.S., maintain eligibility at least through the academic year.

**Rationale** - Consistency of continued access to preschool programs is critical to ensure school readiness and is responsive to the needs of the child rather than the employment status of the parents.

**Action** - Ensure eligibility for children who are four-years-old on or before September 1, 2004 who meet the guidelines for free meals through the School Food Service Program as well as children with other risk factors such as borderline eligibility for exceptional student education, prenatal exposure to harmful substances, a history of child abuse or neglect, English as a Second Language, children of migrant workers, or residents living in the attendance area of a school identified by DOE as either "D" or "F" schools. Subject to available funding, additional four-year-old children meeting the guidelines for reduced price meals could be served.

**Rationale** - Children who are most at risk of future school failure need to receive intervention services as soon as possible. This increases the probability that all children are reading on grade level by the end of third grade and meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation (federal).

**Action** - Ensure eligibility for all children who are four years old on or before September 1, 2005.

**Rationale** - Implementation of UPK amendment is inclusive of all four-year-old children.

### **Accountability, Assessment and Evaluation**

Two main issues need to be addressed in the area of accountability and assessment. The first issue is assessment and evaluation of individual children. The second issue is program accountability.

**Action** - Evaluate children's achievement upon entry into and upon completion of the program.

**Rationale** - Individual evaluations should be based on norm-referenced, validated and reliable instruments. Individual assessment is critical in adapting instructional methods to meet the needs of children in achieving pre-literacy and pre-mathematical skills.

**Action** - Evaluations should be administered by trained early childhood professionals.

**Rationale** - The instruments should be consistent statewide to guarantee the ability to compare data from district to district. Adequate training of screeners/evaluators is critical.

**Action** - Capture individual children's entry and exit achievement data on school district information services system for longitudinal reporting.

**Rationale** - Longitudinal achievement data are critical to adapt programmatic components to be most effective and efficient.

**Action** - Report children's entry and exit scores to parents

**Rationale** - Parents should be kept informed of their children's progress.

**Action** - Report a summary of kindergarten readiness scores for UPK providers on the DOE website; including percentage and number of children determined to be ready for kindergarten.

**Rationale** - The public should be kept informed regarding the outcomes of children served in all school readiness programs to ensure informed parent choice.

**Action** - Program Accountability – Direct the Department of Education to develop and provide a report similar to the School Public Accountability for Universal Prekindergarten providers on its website. These summary scores for each provider will include the total number of children screened, total number of children determined to be ready for kindergarten and the percentage of children determined to be ready. These data need to be disaggregated to reflect scores of subpopulations such as race, gender and economic status. Comparison of early pre and post test scores should be correlated to later FCAT scores to determine if there is a predictability factor.

**Rationale** - Program accountability needs to include overall program operations, activities, expenditures, number of students served, ratio of staff to children, staff qualifications, and individual student evaluation findings. Program data need to be collected and measured longitudinally in order to adapt programmatic components for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

All programs participating in the Universal Prekindergarten Program must electronically store, retrieve, and transmit evaluation and demographic data to the Department of Education. Data must be reported by each program provider (school-based, child care center, Head Start program, etc.) to the state and made available to the appropriate

governmental agencies for analysis. In addition, data and outcomes must be made available to the public.

### **Funding Methodology - Per Pupil Reimbursement**

Programs must be reimbursed through a basic FTE system that may be tiered based on the qualifications of the staff providing the services. This should be phased-in over the next few years as follows:

### **Implementation Timeline**

#### **2003**

**Action** – Allocate to DOE the \$100 million that was previously budgeted to DOE for Preschool Programs to serve as many of the eligible four-year-old children as possible. Up to 25% may be children at risk because of other risk factors such as participation in the exceptional student education program, prenatal exposure to harmful substances, a history of child abuse or neglect, English as a Second Language, and children of migrant workers. As in the past, families will not be assessed a fee for participation.

**Rationale** – This funding maintains the previous state commitment. By not being used as match for federal dollars, these funds may be used to serve children whose families become ineligible for federal programs and to serve at-risk children who, for a variety of reasons, are not eligible for other programs. Phasing in of the Universal PreKindergarten Program will allow school districts to maintain or reinstate PreKindergarten programs either on-site and/or in contracted programs that meet quality standards set by the state.

**Action** – Initiate an FTE funding structure for UPK regardless of the classroom setting (on school site or contracted). The FTE formula should be separately funded as a categorical. To provide high-quality literacy focused programs the annual per-child allocation should match the district's FTE for a 6-hour day, 180-day school year.

**Rationale** – Consistency and predictability of funding are required of all providers to ensure retention of qualified personnel and a high quality program. Daily attendance-based reimbursement is too unstable for all providers. Payment should be based on membership.

**Action** – Continue to provide funding for extended day and extended year care and supplemental services for qualified low-income families through community coordinated child care agencies.

**Rationale** - Economic self-sufficiency of low-income, high-risk families will be jeopardized if the services are not available to them at an affordable rate.

**Action** – Determine site capacity needs, personnel needs, and parent preference of program sites by initiating an application process for families eligible for Universal PreKindergarten services for four-year-olds in 2005.

**Rationale** – The state and school districts need data to make accurate predictions for future funding and capacity needs.

**Action** – Revise the Department of Education’s FISH report to include PreKindergarten classrooms as allowable use of space.

**Rationale** – The report in its current configuration forces school districts to report facility usage that is not reflective of actual and appropriate use.

## **2004**

**Action** – Allocate additional funding to ensure services to all four-year-old children meeting free meal guidelines as well as other risk factors such as borderline eligibility for exceptional student education programs, prenatal exposure to harmful substances, a history of child abuse or neglect, English as a Second Language, children of migrant workers, and residents living in the attendance area of a school identified by the DOE as “D” or “F” as well as funding for children meeting reduced price meal guidelines with additional risk factors.

**Rationale** – Phasing in the Universal PreKindergarten Program will allow districts to expand PreKindergarten programs either on-site and/or in contracted programs that meet quality standards set by the state.

**Action** – Report data by school districts to DOE regarding applications received for UPK, including staffing projections as well as parent preference for location.

**Rationale** – Projections for funding needs and program availability are needed prior to the legislative session.

## **2005**

**Action** – Provide full funding for Universal Pre-Kindergarten for every four-year-old child, 6 hours per day, 180 days per school year.

**Rationale** – The Universal PreKindergarten Amendment requires availability of a high quality PreKindergarten program for all four-year-old children.

## **District Administrative/Indirect Costs**

School district and provider administrative/indirect costs should not exceed 5% of the total allocation.



**Start-up for New Classroom Unit/Capital Outlay** (one time only)

A reasonable amount of funds should be allocated or allowed for costs associated with construction and expenses necessary to initiate a quality UPK program in a public school setting. The former prekindergarten program did not allow for the cost of construction, but did permit for the leasing of portables. With the implementation of a constitutional amendment, reimbursement for construction costs should be reexamined. However, such costs should be kept to a minimum and must not consume operating funds. In addition to construction costs, an amount should be allowed for start-up costs for a new classroom unit. Again, such costs should be kept to a minimum and should be for the purpose of enhancing and upgrading existing equipment, if available. Finally, an amount should be allowed for outdoor learning spaces and playground equipment at a site or school. Appropriate documentation and justification for such funds must be included in the application. The current facility model for the existing K-12 system should be used as guidance in developing a model for UPK.

**Allowable Costs*****Salaries and Benefits***

Payment of salaries and benefits should be allowed for teachers and teacher assistants who provide educational services directly to four-year-old children. Salaries and benefits must be commensurate with other professional and nonprofessionals in similar positions within the local education agency. Other salaries for support staff or administrative staff such as directors, cooks, secretaries, janitors, etc. should be approved. However, these salaries should be consistent with school district salary schedules or capped by a predetermined formula.